

□ 1515

The end result of this legislation is going to be to improve the quality of health care for hundreds of thousands of veterans all across America. It will help our VA hospitals and medical centers retain the finest quality in nurses and physician assistants and dental hygienists. This is significant legislation, because it will significantly help those Americans who have been willing to put their lives on the line for our country.

So while there is no great conflict, there will be no headlines in the newspapers. I want to thank the gentleman from Arizona and the gentleman from Arkansas and the gentleman from Mississippi for carrying on the business of Congress in such an efficient and professional manner.

Mr. Speaker, I must add a personal editorial note, that it is a shame that the American people do not see the Congress operating as it has operated on this legislation, in a very positive way, a very amicable way, a very non-partisan way. If the American people were to see Congress working on this as the leaders have worked on both sides of the aisle on this legislation, I think perhaps people would have a better and fairer sense of the way Congress operates on much of our business.

So this legislation is good legislation. It is going to help our Nation's veterans, and I want to urge passage of it today.

Mr. Speaker, let me finalize my comments by saying I would be remiss if I were not to pay tribute to the gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. MONTGOMERY]. I came here as a young man straight out of Texas A&M University in 1974 to work for the then chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Olin E. "Tiger" Teague, a gentleman that was known at the time as Mr. Veteran of the Congress. Mr. Teague told me about another gentleman who at the time was taking a real leadership position for our veterans, and particularly fighting for the interests of our POW's and MIA's. He told me that Mr. MONTGOMERY would be known as the next Mr. Veteran of the U.S. Congress, and that is in fact what has happened for so many years of great and unselfish service.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know of any Member of Congress who has served with greater distinction, with greater class, with greater humility, with greater kindness, or greater commitment, genuine commitment, to helping those men and women who are willing to fight for our country. This is the first piece of legislation that Mr. MONTGOMERY has helped bring to the floor since his announcement that he is going to retire.

Mr. Speaker, I simply want to say on behalf of all of my colleagues in Congress and all of the veterans of America that we will miss dearly, we will miss greatly, the gentleman from Mississippi who has set a standard of gentlemanness, a standard of profes-

sionalism that we younger Members of Congress for many years to come would be well advised to follow. If we were to do so, and this Congress were to act in its business always as Mr. MONTGOMERY has always acted on his congressional business, the institution of Congress would be held in high esteem by all Americans.

So to the general from Mississippi, to the gentleman from Mississippi, I say it is an honor to serve with the gentleman. This is not a goodbye today because we are fortunate to have the services of the gentleman for many months to come until the next election, but thank you for your leadership.

I thank the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP] and the gentleman from Arkansas [Mr. HUTCHINSON] for their fine work on this piece of legislation.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Texas [Mr. EDWARDS]. I first met the gentleman many years ago, the gentleman from Waco, and we met those great World War II Texas Division people that were in Italy and fought so well. The gentleman from Texas [Mr. EDWARDS] has a wonderful veterans district with several hospitals there, and I appreciate the kind words he said. I still will be around for 14 months, I hope.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Texas [Mr. DE LA GARZA].

Mr. DE LA GARZA. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding time to me.

Mr. Speaker, I echo the words of my colleague from Texas, Mr. EDWARDS, not only on this bill, but in relation to our good friend, General MONTGOMERY. I rise in support of the legislation and I commend both sides for what they have done for the veterans.

Let me say that General MONTGOMERY and I came here at the same time, and for us, from Texas, it was certainly an easy transition from Olin "Tiger" Teague who was Mr. Veteran to Mr. Veteran General MONTGOMERY.

I take great pride in mentioning the Montgomery bill of rights. Recently when both gentlemen, the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP] and the gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. MONTGOMERY] were in Hawaii for the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, and I was privileged to accompany them, I told one of the young men who was about to be made sergeant the next day and he was already talking about when he might return home, and I said, "Well, you can get an education", and he says, "Oh, yes, the Montgomery bill of rights." And I pointed to the gentleman from Mississippi, and I said, "That is the Montgomery bill of rights right there." And with great awe and admiration he rushed over to thank Mr. MONTGOMERY, and that is his legacy.

Mr. Speaker, I know later we will have other comments, but in associa-

tion with what we do today, the gentleman from Mississippi will have left a legacy as a friend of the veteran, and all of us who are veterans thank him.

This legislation is good. We still have a long ways to go in regards to taking care of the problems of veterans, but I feel very comfortable with the two gentlemen managing the bill here that we will address those issues, and I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want also to thank the gentleman from Texas for his very kind remarks. I enjoyed very much having his wife and himself on our trip. He is a World War II veteran.

To the gentleman from Texas [Mr. DE LA GARZA], there is a seat right there in front for you tomorrow and I hope you will be right there. Mr. DE LA GARZA was in two services, I believe. He was in the Army and also in the Navy, and that is rather unusual. So I thank the gentleman again for his kindness.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank both the gentlemen from Texas for their remarks about this bill, and I would especially like to thank Mr. EDWARDS for his kind remarks about the operation of his committee and mine, and I want the gentleman to know that he is one of the reasons why we operate in a bipartisan manner.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. EVERETT). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP] that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1384, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

EXTENDING THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AUTHORITY TO USE NURSE ANESTHETIST CONTRACT SALARY DATA IN ESTABLISHING PAY RATES FOR VA-EMPLOYED NURSE ANESTHETISTS

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1536) to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend for 2 years an expiring authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs with respect to determination of locality salaries for certain nurse anesthetist positions in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1536

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That section 7451(d)(3)(C)(iii) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking out "April 1, 1995" and inserting in lieu thereof "December 31, 1997".

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LATHAM). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP] will be recognized for 20 minutes and the gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. MONTGOMERY] will be recognized for 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP].

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous materials on H.R. 1536.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arizona?

There was no objection.

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1536 would extend until December 31, 1997, the authority to permit VA Medical Center Directors to use nurse anesthetist contract agency compensation data to adjust locality-based nurse pay rates.

This would only be done where a VA locality survey provides insufficient data.

The Department requested extension of this authority which will allow the VA to remain competitive in the job market for nurse anesthetists.

The Congressional Budget Office has stated the bill would have no significant cost to the Federal Government.

I want to thank the ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, SONNY MONTGOMERY for helping move the bill to the floor.

I also want to thank TIM HUTCHINSON, chairman of the Hospitals and Health Care Subcommittee, and CHET EDWARDS the subcommittee's ranking member for their efforts on the bill.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, I yield yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Texas [Mr. EDWARDS].

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, again, as with the previous legislation that we just passed, this legislation will basically help the VA medical centers bring the best quality of health care to our Nation's veterans by allowing flexibility in pay scale for VA nurse anesthetists. This will allow us to keep many of our finest nurse anesthetists in the VA hospitals. Without this legislation, there is a very real chance that many of these important people in our VA health care system might be pulled out of the public health care system and somewhere into private practice. If that were to happen, that would be a loss not only to our VA health care centers, but to the veterans that they serve.

Mr. Speaker, once again, as in the previous legislation, I want to com-

mend the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP] and the gentleman from Arkansas [Mr. HUTCHINSON] for their leadership on this important legislation, along with the gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. MONTGOMERY] for his leadership as the ranking member of the full committee. I urge passage of this legislation.

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Arkansas [Mr. HUTCHINSON].

Mr. HUTCHINSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 1536. I want to commend the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP] for his work on this bill and for bringing it to the floor today. Again, I thank the ranking member, the gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. MONTGOMERY], for his work on this bill, along with so many on behalf of veterans. I also want to express my gratitude to the gentleman from Texas [Mr. EDWARDS], the ranking member on the Subcommittee on Hospitals and Health Care, for his kind words earlier and for his good work and for how easy it is to work with him on behalf of all veterans.

This is another one of those bills, as Mr. EDWARDS said, that will not be on the evening news, but it is an example of the way Congress ought to work. Mr. Speaker, members of this committee, Mr. STUMP, Mr. MONTGOMERY, Mr. EDWARDS, and the other members of our committee, Mr. KENNEDY, we have very strong differences on many issues. We certainly are no less loyal to our political parties, but what makes this committee work so well is a greater loyalty to our veterans. While we feel strongly about our particular issues, we feel even stronger about the need to work together on behalf of the veterans of this country. So it is a great committee on which to serve.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in full support of this legislation to extend the expiring authority to determine locality pay for VA nurse anesthetists and urge immediate passage of the bill. The bill continues the VA authority to use salary data from any employee of nurse anesthetists as a means of setting appropriate locality pay rates to December 31, 1997. This authority was made necessary because of a quirk in the Veterans Affairs Nurse Pay Act of 1990 which established a locality pay system for VA nurses, but failed to provide an adequate means for determining the rates of pay for nurse anesthetists.

The legislation passed unanimously in both the Subcommittee on Hospitals and Health Care and the full Veterans Affairs Committee. It is supported by the VA, and CBO has concluded that the legislation has no significant cost to the Federal Government. So once again, Mr. Speaker, I urge quick passage of H.R. 1536.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 minute.

Mr. Speaker, there have been some around here who have said in years

past that the members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs get up and congratulate each other on both sides of the aisle, and I like that. I think we would do much better around here if we did that in other committees, if we were to work more closely together. We enjoy working with the other side of the aisle, as they enjoy working with us. Of course, we have a wonderful constituency in that we have the veterans and their dependents and the others who are affected by what we do in veterans programs.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this legislation, and I would hope that this would be a unanimous vote.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1530

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LATHAM). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. STUMP] that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1536.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 1995

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2394) to increase, effective as of December 1, 1995, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2394

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 1995".

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) RATE ADJUSTMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, effective on December 1, 1995, increase the dollar amounts in effect for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation by the Secretary, as specified in subsection (b).

(b) AMOUNTS TO BE INCREASED.—The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to subsection (a) are the following:

(1) COMPENSATION.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1114 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under sections 1115(1) of such title.

(3) CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.—The dollar amount in effect under section 1162 of such title.